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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature about women in management advocates the pursuit of research on women executives as unique components in the organizational setting, with the warning that careful and unremitting attention be paid to the selection of theoretical perspectives. It examines trait and role theory, and discusses such factors as aggressiveness and dominance versus dependency and submission; self-confidence and self-esteem; emotional control and sound judgement; and achievement motivation. It then considers leadership styles and behaviors, looking at women executives as democrats, autocrats, and iconoclasts. Finally it considers literature related to systems theories and structural variables as determinants of leadership behavior. (TJ)

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Women in Management:

Leadership Theories, Research Results, and Future Directions

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WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT: LEADERSHIP THEORIES, RESEARCH RESULTS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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The title of this program "The Female as a Unique Component in Communication Research" seems particularly analogous to an ongoing controversy within circles of organizational trainers and human resource specialists. This debate, which is quite fervent in the assertiveness-training arena, centers on the dual-quiries, 'Should we offer separate managerial training programs for men and women?' and if so, 'Why?'

The theme of 'uniqueness of women' in communication research and management training seems a particularly salient one for several reasons. First, continued emphasis on segmentation between women and men can lead to the problems we see with some of the literature on sex differences, i.e., a tendency to rely on sex-stereotype role theories which often direct us to insignificant research questions and to self-evident, even tautological, answers. Thus the issue, 'Are male managers more assertive and emotionally stable than female managers are?' is a quiry which, although congruent with trait-role predictions, ignores the ultimate test for conducting research, that is, if differences exist, are they important to us? or how do they contribute to our theoretical understanding of managerial systems and the role of communication within such systems?

An additional problem with this approach is a tendency to perpetuate dualism between the sexes through a priori assumptions of differences. It seems that socialization experiences, which potentially influence communicative behaviors are not neatly pigeonholed into two discrete slots. Thus, bipolarity of gender, whether determined by anatomic characteristics

or by self-report measures of masculinity-femininity, not only artificially dichotomotizes and over-simplifies a complex variable but also argues tautologically for distinctions between men and women (Johnson and Leck, 1975; Patton and Patton, 1976; Constantinople, 1973).

This criticism, however, is aimed at research which conceives of gender as a dichotomous variable. Investigators which focus on androgyny or on multi-dimensional approaches to defining gender attempt to emend the epistemological trappings embedded in assumptions of dualism (Bem, 1974).

A second problem in focusing on women as a unique component stems from an ethical concern. Will isolation and examination of women managers apart from men managers perpetuate the status quo by providing evidence of stereotypic differences? (Johnson and Leck, 1975) In effect, if we focus on the uniqueness of women in a supervisory role, we may inadvertently extend the already expansive power gaps between men and women in organizations.

Yet, despite these potentially inherent difficulties, I advocate the pursuance of research on women executives as a unique component in the organizational setting, but only with careful, unremitting attention to the selection of theoretical perspectives which underlie our work and to the subsequent implications of our findings. To this end, this paper presents a review and critique of women in management literature in three conceptual and theoretical domains: trait and role theory, managerial style and leadership effectiveness, and systems theory. Throughout this review, I will attempt to highlight the implications of each perspective for communication research and the assumptions about

the uniqueness of women which undergird each of the three areas. Finally, this paper will conclude with suggestions for future research.

The Great Woman Theory or The Trait Theory Revisited

In our society the image of a successful leader is a person who is aggressive, forceful, competitive, achievement oriented, self-confident, and independent. These traits tend to be more often associated with men than with women. Women are generally depicted as emotional, passive, dependent, nurtural, intuitive, and submissive. Thus a woman manager often finds herself placed in a double bind. If she displays the culturally defined traits of a woman, she is rejected as an unacceptable manager. If she acts according to the male defined role of a leader, she is condemned as being unfeminine. Since the woman manager cannot simultaneously conform to society's expectations of both woman and manager, she is faced with a paradox. The either-or nature of these choices polarizes those who advise women managers and confuses the women with contradictory recommendations.

In publications for the woman executive, three commonly mentioned sets of personality traits are aggressiveness and dominance, self-confidence and self-esteem, and emotional control and sound judgment. A review of this literature illustrates that (a) women face a double bind in the management role, (b) the advice they receive is often contradictory, and (c) the research on these traits does not support the belief that they are critical to effective leadership.

Aggressiveness and Dominance versus Dependency and Submission

The words 'aggressiveness' and 'dominance' often appear interchangeably in literature about women in management. Even though these terms may connote different aspects of the same concept, authors rarely differentiate between them. Some writers agree that aggressiveness is an essential quality for women managers, while others temper this conclusion by pointing to the negative effects of too much dominance or suggest that men are repelled by aggression, yet critical when women lack it.

As an advocate of the former position, Bremer (1973) contends that female executives should:

> be aggressive when called for--force yourself to be assertive. Subordinates rely on you to settle grievances, get them renumeration that they deserve, and take action on problems they are not in a position to solve. Fear of making a mistake may seriously impair your ability to function on the job. However, women should not become defensive about being a woman and overcompensate by being aggressively high-handed or heavy handed in dealings with them (men). (p. 16)

On the other hand, Basil's survey of 316 managers (102 female, 214 male) supports the belief that aggressiveness is a negative quality for female managers. He found:

> Negative attitudes on the part of men appear confined to women executives who show a tendency to demand equality, to try to be masculine, to insist on asserting ego, to be domineering and aggressive. Some of the attributes found necessary for success in management, such as aggressiveness, have been found by women in their social role to repel men . . . . If men cannot accept harshness and aggressiveness in women, can women perform a managerial function utilizing more womanly attributes and be accepted? (Basil, 1972, pp. 96, 108)

Due to the paradoxical link between these two seemingly contradictory positions, it is not unusual to find both stances advocated within

the same publication. When Lynch enumerates the attributes for successful female leadership, she urges women

> to be strong but not aggressive . . . (to) be self-assertive, (to) make the right decisions quickly and (to) handle subordinates with humor and firmness. (Lynch, 1973, p. 27)

Later she points out that fear of being too aggressive is one of the 'hang-ups' female supervisors face in executing their managerial duties.

Discussions of aggressiveness or dominance as personality traits of female leaders suffer from ambiguous meanings aligned with these words. This is evident in the wide variety of terms used to describe aggressiveness:

1) assertive, heavy handed (Bremer, 1973)

2) demanding, asserting ego, domineering, harshness (Basil, 1972)

3) firmness, strength (Lynch, 1973)

4) self-initiative, drive, fortitude (Woods, 1975)

5) overreacting, forwardness (Epstein, 1973)

It is apparent from this semantic confusion that the terms 'aggressiveness' and 'dominance' do not refer to a similar set of leadership skills and behaviors; thus, definitions of these traits are not interchangeable.

The feminine traits of dependency and submissiveness are outgrowths of a lack of self-assertion. What our culture deems feminine are derivations of dependency. Men usually select aggression or detachment when faced with anxiety; whereas women traditionally opt for dependency which, in turn, leads to submissiveness, self-effacement, and fear of self-assertion. Yet, for some male executives, a woman must meet their expectations of a dependent female or she threatens their masculinity.

If she is not dependent on them, they may withhold information she needs or use her as a scapegoat.

As with recommendations about aggressiveness, advice on female submissiveness is often inconsistent. Some authors feel that dependency is a negative attribute for successful female leadership; others tend to qualify their rejection of this trait with reservations about when and how women should relinquish it.

One question left unanswered by many of these writers is whether these traits actually are important to one desirous of being an effective leader. Research does not lend strong support to this assumption (Stogdill, 1974). In fact, the relationship between dominance and effective leadership was generally low and hinged upon a range of situational factors. No evidence can be found to link aggressiveness to such management skills as tackling challenging assignments, setting achievable goals, planning, organizing, persuading, conciliating, and conveying enthusiasm. Thus the notion that successful managers are dominant or aggressive may depend on the situation she or he encounters. It seems futile to talk about degrees, too much or too little dominance. Consequently when authors admonish female executives to be more or less aggressive, they continue to nurture the double bind women face.

Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem

Lack of confidence in her abilities to excel is another problem a woman manager encounters. In a survey on the relationship of self-concept to sex-role stereotypes, women reported lower opinions of their self-worth than did men (Rosencrantz, et.al., 1968). This phenomenon seems linked to the high social desirability of masculine characteristics.

When self-esteem is inversely related to femininity, yet positively linked with feelings of competence, women must struggle with an identity double bind. However, since most of the research on self-esteem focuses on college-age or high school women, we do not know whether male and female managers differ on perceptions of self-esteem.

Studies on the traits of leaders conducted from 1904 to 1970 reveal that self-confidence is one characteristic which has shown a consistent and positive relationship with leadership (Stogdill, 1974). The findings suggest that leaders rate higher than followers in self-confidence and self-esteem. However, the development of self-confidence is highly dependent upon the way one is treated. In a job setting workers need support and positive feedback to increase confidence in a particular job and this reinforcement is contingent on effective performance. Therefore, whether one becomes self-confident depends upon what the situation is and how they have been rewarded for their performance in previous similar situations.

Emotional Control and Sound Judgment

Emotional versus logical is a popular stereotype for contrasting sex differences in making decisions. In Basil's survey almost three-forths of the 214 male respondents (71%) and a significant percentage of the 102 female supervisors (49%) agree that women are more emotional and less rational than men (Basil, 1972).

Surveys of male managers consistently report that men feel women are tempermentally unsuited for management; that is, they are too emotional and tense for work that requires objectivity, analytical skills,

and careful reasoning. Moreover, in Schein's survey of 300 middle-line supervisors, subjects identified emotional stability, aggressiveness, self-reliance, desire for responsibility, and objectivity as the requisite characteristics for successful management, for both men and women. Thus, the perceived similarity between the characteristics of successful managers and men in our society intensifies a female manager's role struggle (Schein, 1973, 1975).

Some writers who acknowledge the prevalence of this belief caution female executives to control their emotions, avoid being whimsical or disorganized in reasoning, and to remain cool and dignified in a crisis. This advice, though, tends to foster the double bind. If a woman is too emotional, she's an ineffectual executive who behaves like a female; yet if she's too cold and aloof, she becomes a parody of a man.

Again the research findings do not support the contention that leaders are consistently characterized by a high degree of self-control or by a lack of emotional expression. Many studies show a slight positive link between these factors and leadership, but some reveal a zero relationship or a slight negative association between the two (Stogdill, 1974).

Achievement Motivation

Traits of dominance—dependency, self-confidence and emotional control may be moderated by achievement motivation, an attribute which demonstrates a positive correlation with leadership ability in twenty-eight studies (Stogdill, 1974). Early research on the drive to excel reveals that females, due to their socialization, fear failure and consequently set their aspirations lower than their male counterparts do (Atkinson, 1957; Strickland, 1971).

But Matina Horner (1972) interprets this low drive to excel as a motive to avoid success. In this sense, women who strive for intellectual mastery violate appropriate sex role behavior and consequently, experience anxiety which, in turn, inhibits task performance. Since Horner's findings are based on a college sample, Woods and Greenfeld (1976) replicate the fear of success research with 18 male and 18 female corporate executives. Their findings do not support Horner's hypothesis. In fact, both males and females demonstrate apprehension toward success.

Other field studies demonstrate that female executives rank as high as their male counterparts in the desire for promotion and career-related outcomes, and in the drive to attain power and feelings of self-actualization (Herrick, 1973; Brief and Oliver, 1976; Morrison and Sebald, 1974). In fact, a goal of many top women executives is to integrate their roles and achievement needs into fully congruent, self-actualized people (Hennig and Jardim, 1977).

Thus, it appears that female managers are either a select group of highly-motivated individuals or that women, in general, may not be as low in achievement motivation as initial research reports. Perhaps women do not lack a drive to excel, but have directed this energy in such socially acceptable tasks as volunteer work and raising children.

Problems with the Trait Approach

Research on the suitability of women for managerial positions relies heavily on sex-stereotypic traits. When investigations depart from these assumptions and examine other aptitudes associated with managerial performance, women equal if not excel their male counterparts.

The Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation, Inc., measured 300 men and women on 22 basic aptitudes. There were no discernable sex differences for analytical reasoning, inductive reasoning, numerical and design memory, and objective personality. However, men excelled women in structural visualization and muscular grip while females surpassed males in accounting aptitude, verbal fluency, and abstract visualization of ideas (Johnson, 1975).

In sum, the literature on personal characteristics of effective female leadership reflects a controversy as to whether women should emphasize masculine or feminine traits. These contradictions lead to antithetical recommendations which confound rather than obviate the dilemmas of women managers. Examples of such advice are:

> Female executives should avoid behavior that reinforces stereotypes about women . . . . They should give up their own stereotypes and exert forthrightness (Bremer, 1973, p. 22).

> The quality of a woman executive which gives her an upper hand on the management level is her feminine responsiveness. It is not only possible but preferable that a woman retain her feminine responsiveness without losing the power of assertion or even of command. Gentle assertiveness on the part of a woman is not only more becoming but, likewise, more effective (Hackamack, 1972, p. 102).

> The world of work is a man's world. Women must either play by the rules or suffer the consequences (Dunlap, 1972, p. 21).

> The skills and behaviors required of good managers are those oriented to female stereotypes. They are trained in human relations, in the maintenance of a social unit, and in serving subordinates' needs (Goode, 1973, p. 98).

> Male peers must be able to recognize the same executive characteristics in you as they do in fellow males (Lynch, 1973, p. 17).

> Acceptance of stereotypical male characteristics as a basis for success in management may be a necessity for the woman seeking to achieve in current organizational climates (Schein, 1975, p. 343).

Trait theories, while a dominant approach to leadership research prior to World War II, are antiquated and ineffectual. Over twenty-five years of extensive studies on the personal characteristics of successful leaders produced inconclusive results on the vast majority of personality traits (Stogdill, 1974). Should we repeat this approach in our study of women managers?

Moreover, the study of sex-trait differences is likely to increase rather than lessen a woman manager's role dilemma. The presence of counterpositions in advocating appropriate traits for female leaders seems ironical in that most investigators agree that organizations should break away from sex-stereotyping of managerial roles. Yet, the very nature of dwelling on sex-linked traits seems to emphasize male versus female attributes (Putnam and Heinen, 1978).

In some sense our language system contributes to this problem. The words we use to describe sex roles, 'masculine' and 'feminine,' are defined by culturally-prescribed traits; consequently when we use the terms, 'male' or 'female,' we inadvertently refer to the personality factors that define these words. The inverse then follows. When we discuss these personality traits we connote references to sex. Our language system, then, not only depicts men and women as opposites, but also defines 'male' and 'female' as personality traits.

Since language patterns foster this double bind, if women are encouraged to become more assertive, less emotional, and more logical than they currently are, the implication is that females must acquire

these stereotyped masculine traits. Yet, when writers suggest that female executives use their soft, gentle feminine style, they imply she shouldn't exhibit any male-oriented traits. Opportunities for the self-fulfilling prophecy to take effect may increase with continued emphasis upon the differences in male-female traits.

Basically, the trait approach is not useful because it characterizes leadership in terms of personal characteristics. It ignores the nature of the task, the organizational context, and any characteristics of the followers. In addition, it neglects the important fact that leadership is not static, but dynamic. The accomplishment of the task involves a complex interplay of forces between the leader and the situational factors that she or he faces.

Moreover, this perspective cast women into a sex-stereotype feminine role which is in constant struggle with external demands to become masculine. Although the conflict portrays a female manager in a unique position, it misrepresents her complex character and her overall impact in the organizational milieu.

The trait approach offers little promise to communication researchers who view male-female relationships in organizations as more multifaceted, dynamic, and situational than can be predicted from a set of static dispositions. Yet, even though some investigators acknowledge the limitations of this perspective, sex stereotype traits form the locus of much research on the behaviors, styles and performance evaluations of female executives.

Leadership Styles and Behaviors: Women Executives as Democrats, Autocrats, or Iconoclasts

Since the early work of Strodtbeck and Mann (1956), females are typecast as the socio-emotional or maintenance leaders of groups while males are seen as the taskmasters. This demarcation between the functions of group care-taking and those of task accomplishment resemble such leadership styles as employee-centered versus job-centered managerial behavior or the philosophical assumptions of Theory X and Theory Y. Congruent with sex-stereotypic predictions, Robie (1973) posits that a feminine leadership style or a participatory, Theory Y approach, will produce better results than a traditional Theory X male orientation.

Yet, despite the social logic of this assumption, the archtypal female executive is usually depicted as an emasculating bitch. In a more moderate tone, Henning and Jardim (1977), explain this phenomena in a developmental perspective. Early career paths of women managers follow successful performance through attainment of organizational goals. In pursuit of these goals, women executives often devote the totality of their energies to task activities and neglect the people dimension. Thus, the behavioral style which came to typify this situation was that of a calloused, impersonal, formal executive.

Empirical research on female leadership fails to support either Theory X or Theory Y patterns. When 327 subjects describe how fraternity and sorority leaders should behave, male leaders emerge as more authoritarian than female leaders, especially on matters which pertain to group goals, exercise of power, and control of members.

However, on five of the nineteen items women are seen as more autocratic than men are. Thus, it seems that women as well as men exhibit some autocratic characteristics (Denmark and Diggory, 1966).

In Rosenfeld and Fowler's study (1976) of personality correlates of leadership style, democratic women leaders are characterized as open-minded and nurturing while democratic male leaders are described as forceful and analytical. Both male and female autocratic leaders, though, are depicted as aggressive and revengeful.

Since this study samples college students only, a field investigation of female managers may yield different results. With a sample of male-female banking supervisors, both sexes were judged more effective when managers exhibited a nurturing style as opposed to a task-oriented one. But a friendly-dependent style was seen as most effective when a manager interacted with a subordinate of the opposite-sex.

Studies on leadership style, it seems, produce inconclusive findings. Style, as well as traits, may be a reflection of the way a manager behaves in a situation or, more specifically, the way he or she interacts with a particular subordinate.

In many respects research on leadership behaviors of women executives follow the models used for studying male managers. Such traditional approaches employ the Ohio State Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) and Fiedler's Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) to ascertain employee satisfaction with consideration and initiating structure. In a study of 165 university staff employees, consideration correlates with employee satisfaction at $r = .57$ for female leaders and a $r = .13$ for their male counterparts.

On initiating structure, however, there were no significant differences in satisfaction with male or female supervisors (Petty and Gordon, 1965).

Similarly, in Day and Stogdill's investigation (1972) of 38 male and 38 female Air Force officers, subordinates described women officers as higher on consideration and production emphasis than were male leaders, but these differences were not statistically significant. Moreover, when business students evaluated stories which cast males and females in four leadership styles, females were judged higher on consideration than males were while males excelled in structuring task activities. Sex of the evaluator also influenced assessment of managerial style in that females viewed structuring behaviors higher than males did (Bartol and Butterfeld, 1976).

Whereas studies with the LBDQ showed that females were consistently higher than males were on consideration, investigations which used Fiedler's LPC revealed no significant differences between male and female on interpersonal and task-oriented styles. These findings held even when task structure, position power, and leader-member relations were rotated to fit Fiedler's model (Chapman and Luthans, 1975; Rice, Richer and Vitters, 1977). Perhaps, Fiedler's model, though suitable for male responses to leadership contingencies, might be inappropriate for female styles of managing power and task situations.

Assessment of managerial communication functions and styles represents a departure from traditional approaches to the study of leader behaviors. Baird and Bradley (1978) employed an 18-item vari-

ation of Norton's communicator style inventory, to describe communication functions of 150 managers in three organizations. Their findings paralleled work on consideration styles of women executives, that is, females exceeded males in scores on giving information, promoting happy relations, being receptive to ideas, encouraging effort, showing concern, and being attentive. On the other hand, males surpassed females on scores of dominance, directing conversations, and contentiousness. Such findings may be useful to management trainers who design programs to aid women in developing skills such as delegating authority, organizing work, tactful assertion of ideas, and on-the-job counseling (Toyne, 1977).

Leadership style is not only related to the execution of managerial functions but also to the language patterns embedded in these messages. Whereas some authors advise women to enhance credibility by developing more masculine speech patterns, others argue that emulation of male communication styles may hinder task accomplishment.

To test these assumptions, Bate (1978) collected managerial ratings of seven vignettes which exemplified male-stereotypic, female-stereotypic, and non-sextyped language. The ratings supported the use of non-stereotypic language for both males and females. Moreover, there were no significant differences in vignettes which depicted men using male stereotypic language styles and those which showed women exemplifying the same patterns. In fact, managers viewed male-stereotypic language as the least effective of the three styles.

Throughout the literature on leadership style, researchers employ subordinates' ratings of supervisory effectiveness as indices

of managerial performance. The assumption is that ineffectual behavioral styles will result in poor performance. But, leadership evaluations, in turn, are confounded by other factors which have only tangential relationship to actual behaviors.

More specifically, subordinates' attitudes toward women as leaders, task situation, sex of rater, and composition of work group affect assessment of managerial performance.

In a study that controlled for composition of the group and task structure, groups with an equal number of males and females who had a positive attitude toward women leaders showed more satisfaction with a female leader than did groups with other sex-member compositions. But groups composed of three males and one female, even with positive attitudes toward women leaders, revealed considerable dissatisfaction with their leader (Verby, 1975). It seemed, then, that sex ratio of groups and positive feelings about female managers affected performance evaluations of female leaders.

Additional support for this premise stemmed from research on the Women as Managers Scale (WAMS), a questionnaire designed to assess attitudes toward women in managerial situations (Peters, Terborg, and Taylor, 1974). In research with this scale, Garland and Price (1977) reported that subjects with positive attitudes toward female executives attributed a woman's performance to her ability and her hard work, while subordinates with negative attitudes credited luck and an easy job as the basis for her success.

Attitudes toward women managers also interacted with the nature of the group's task. In an investigation of female leadership patterns

with West Point cadets, group members with negative attitudes toward female leaders performed better on a structured, mathematical task whereas those with positive attitudes excelled on an unstructured, open-ended discussion task (Rice, Richer, and Vitters, 1977). Hence, a woman's performance evaluation in a particular task situation hinged, to some extent, on her subordinates' predisposition toward a female manager.

Other studies indicated that the sex of a leader, regardless of followers' attitudes, affected group performance and perceptions of leader behavior. In Rice, et. al. study (1977), groups with male leaders generally performed better and expressed greater satisfaction with the group than did members with female leaders. But in situations where the group failed to accomplish its assigned task, male leaders were judged more harshly than females, even though the actual performance of the two were equivalent (Jacobson and Efferty, 1974). Hence, discrimination in performance evaluation based on sex-related stereotyping could potentially jeopardize male as well as female evaluations.

But in regard to promotibility, males continue to receive preferential treatment (Kanter, 1977). As evidence of this practice, 1,500 supervisors responded to eleven hypothetical situations on employee treatment. Managers expressed greater organizational effort to retain valuable male than female employees and showed stronger actions for disciplining female as opposed to male employees. In sum, organizations fostered more concern for the careers of men than for those of women. As Rosen and Jardee (1974) stress:

> ". . . in situations where available information is ambiguous or contradictory, decision makers fall back on preconceived attitudes (sex-role bias) to arrive at their ultimate decision. Only when there are clear-cut rules and qualifications do both men and women stand a chance of breaking out of the stereotyped parts written for them." (p. 58)

Problems with Research on Leadership Style and Performance

Leadership style, as a conceptual framework for the study of women in management, concentrates on actual behaviors of female executives rather than on predispositions to behave. Yet, the bulk of studies reviewed for this paper center on subordinate or self-report perceptions of style or on assessment of leader performance. Thus, investigators seem restricted to a very narrow range within the vast domain of leadership behaviors.

This confinement to familiar terain may explain why some researchers readily transfer theory and practice derived from male-dominated studies to an examination of female leadership. The problem, though, is not in the practice of replicating traditional leadership theories, rather it lies with the omission of comparative validity information or with the absence of a viable rationale for assuming the suitability of this transference.

Although the style approach seems less entrenched in the double bind phenomena than the trait theory is, this perspective continues to base women's uniqueness on sex-stereotype predictions, e.g., female managers demonstrate higher scores on consideration than do male supervisors.

Omitted from these sex-stereotypic assumptions is the impact of organizational environment on the uniqueness of women executives.

To some extent, the leadership style model incorporates such situational factors as subordinate attitudes toward women and task demands. But even with the addition of these variables, leadership still resides primarily in the individual rather than the context.

System and Contingency Theories: Structural Variables as Determinants of Leadership Behavior

The contingency approach to women in management advances the position that organizational factors delimit options for appropriate leadership behavior. Thus, female managers, rather than existing in a vacuum, are influenced by and, in turn, influence their immediate environment. Unlike the trait and style perspectives, the situation, rather than the person, is the most salient force in directing group work processes.

Leadership, as viewed by contingency theorists, is a dynamic relationship between managers and subordinates--one framed within such structural variables as organizational climate, tokenism, power and status hierarchies, and formal-informal peer relationships in the corporation. These factors, then, act en masse to affect managerial behavior as well as perceptions of supervisor performance. The contingency approach, then, supports the assumption that leaders adapt their capabilities, styles, and behaviors to fit the circumstances they encounter.

One factor which seems to impinge on the behavioral alternatives of women executives is organizational climate. In particular, researchers question: how climate affects placement of women managers,

how women supervisors perceive climate, and how gender of leader influences subordinates' perceptions of organizational climate.

The first quiry guided the research of Loring and Wells (1972) who hypothesized that female managers were seldom found in exploitative climates and served only in staff positions, coordinating functions, and personnel-training within paternalistic climates. But in consultative and participatory environments, women functioned more productively in a number of decision-making capacities. To test the second quiry, samples of 25 men and 25 women from three separate organizations completed a battery of tests on autonomy, ascendence, upward communication distortion, risk-taking propensity, and perceived discrimination. Scores on these instruments suggested that male managers viewed the organizational climate as providing more autonomy, more opportunity for decision making, and more authority than did women executives (Athanassiades, 1974).

Moreover, both male and female managers felt governmental and business organizations discriminated against women and especially against those who expressed feelings of low autonomy. That is, women who felt less independent tended to perceive more distortion of upward communication which, in turn, precipitated closer supervision and perpetuated feelings of low autonomy.

Additional research on the perceptions of organizational climate revealed that high school faculty departments led by a male were perceived as higher in esprit de corps and intimacy than were divisions headed by a female, while females were seen as requiring more routine duties and 'busywork.' However, there were no significant

differences between the sexes in regard to aggressiveness, production emphasis, and professional knowledge of the chairperson (Roussell, 1974).

Organizational culture is another aspect of climate which, no doubt, affects the behavior of women managers. Since men build and subsequently control most organizations, the rules, norms and policies of companies reflect a male-oriented culture. Thus, when women concentrate on their individual capabilities and daily work problems at the cost of overlooking critical factors within the male environment, e.g., teamwork and winning, risk-taking, and politicing, they jeopardize their chances of advancement in the corporation (Hennig and Jardim, 1976).

The very entrance of a woman executive into a male culture may exacerbate her potential to adapt to the climate. That is, since her presence upsets the balance and stability of the system, her male colleagues and subordinates are, in some cases, testing and reorienting their patterns to adjust to her. This mutual adaptation process, however, is less likely if the woman is viewed as a token, an interloper, or a solo female in an all-male group (Harragan, 1977; Wolman and Frank, 1975; and Kanter, 1977).

Women tokens, as representatives of their sex, are distinctive from the male majority and thus highly visible in the organization. This visibility of a category type, in turn, intensifies pressures for excellence in performance, for conformity to stereotypic roles, and for symbolic isolation from the majority (Kanter, 1977; Deaux, 1978).

Thus, the practice of 'asking a woman's viewpoint' or 'selecting a woman to serve on a committee' paradoxically functions to recognize her endeavors while simultaneously accentuating her distinctiveness and her identification with a category. In circumstances where women are symbols of their gender, they often feel a loss of individuality and a heightened self-consciousness in job performance (Kanter, 1977).

This token status also affects a manager's participation in peer-group interaction and her attempts to exert power and influence in the organization. Since peer groups constitute the nucleus of informal communication in organizations, a woman's interactions with peers socializes her into the formal and informal work habits, provides her with tacit knowledge about organizational behavior, and gives her a sense of group identity and belongingness.

Too often, though, this socialization process becomes a verbal playground for power volleys and sexist innuendos; such games, in turn, isolate rather than integrate the female executive. As Wolman and Frank (1975) report, male groups tend to ostracize a female member by blocking her contributions and by relegating her participation to low status functions. If she rejects this position, she accentuates her deviancy and inadvertently promotes her own isolation from the group.

This process of sabotaging a woman's leadership attempts is vividly illustrated in Schrank's case study (1977) of three men and two women on a river trip. When a woman took the helm to guide the raft, she would comment on her inexperience and on her apprehensions about maneuvering the boat. The men, with a patriarchal air, would

instruct her on procedures for using the helm and would protect her during the hazardous portions of the river. When one of the women cried, "I can't do it," the men would pause for a moment then say, "Of course, you can do it. It's easy," but their manner reflected thoughts of 'When is she going to give up!!!" Thus, the men undermined the performance of the woman by reinforcing her self-doubts and contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure.

This experience, in Schrank's opinion, parallels male response to female leadership in corporate settings in that males, through fears of relinquishing power, unconsciously ignore or even sabotage a woman's leadership endeavors. For some men, loss of leadership to a female competitor symbolizes sexual impotency. In this case, the male who feels compelled by organizational pressures to support female leadership, yet fears psychological castration, is entrapped in an avoidance-avoidance situation. If he supports the woman supervisory, he feels emasculated and if he opposes her, he must contend with his supervisor and faces charges of being a chauvinist. Faced with such choices the male supervisory may opt for sabotage or withdrawal (Bormann, Pratt, and Putnam, 1978).

Status differences are not only related to power struggles between the sexes but also stem from societal norms of diffuse status. That is, women enter group situations with lower external status than do men. If people rely on external status as a basis for performance expectations, women are likely to assume low power, approval-seeking positions in groups while males engage in humorous repartee combined with direct influence attempts (McGahey, 1975; Jenkins, 1978; Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977).

Men and women, then, differ in the use of influence strategies. While women employ indirect, personal, and submissive tactics, men draw from a repertoire of assertive, objective, and frequently jocular strategies to convince others (Johnson, 1976; Lockheed and Hall, 1976). Coercive and deceptive styles of influence were deemed inappropriate for both sexes.

In Kanter study (1977) of INDSCO, these influence styles were prevalent during informal parties and meetings. Men in mixed-sex groups entertained or attempted to impress women with tales of masculine prowess, with sexual banter and jest, and with talk of male-oriented topics, while men in all-male groups initiated themes of company gossip and domestic matters. In both situations, however, men employed more witticism and frivolity than did women. It seemed, then, that the presence of a woman in a male group increased the camaraderie of the men which, in turn, excalated her discomfort with the situation.

Sexual teasing and fantasies in the Bormann, et. al. study (1978) also symbolized the male-female struggle for leadership. In most instances men initiated sexual joking to undercut the power of female leaders, but in one group, the presence of sexual themes created a climate for sanctioning a woman leader.

Male-female relationships, whether characterized by token status of females, differences in influence strategies, or variations in social interaction patterns, involve negotiation of interpersonal as well as team-member role definitions. Women executives must develop flexible styles for adapting to specific relationships and

must avoid being pigeonholed as mother, lover, buddy, or emasculating bitch (Bradford, 1975). This flexibility involves the sensitivity to distinguish playfulness from sexual invitation and to develop witty, non-defensive patterns for handling sexist comments.

In sum, women managerial patterns, when viewed from the contingency perspective, entails a complex interplay between individuals and structural factors, e.g., organizational climate, tokenism, power and influence strategies, and peer relationships. The uniqueness of women within the systems approach stems from her participation in a predominantly male-oriented organization, rather than her ascribed sex-stereotypic traits. Her uniqueness is intertwined to her acceptance into the male culture, her job performance, and her access to power. As long as women continue to occupy a disproportionately small number of middle and upper managerial slots, these structural factors will continue to affect the integration and promotion of women supervisors.

Communication research from the contingency perspective could focus on message patterns which characterize control and influence in managerial groups and on the interaction processes which serve to socialize or to isolate female supervisors. Such investigations might cluster into the following areas:

> Relationships: What communication patterns characterize relational control definitions of effective and ineffective women managers? How do female supervisors make choices about the appropriateness of content and style of their interactions with peers? With subordinates? How do women managers handle sexual teasing and male-oriented verbal games? What messages characterize relational patterns of the solo woman as opposed to the non-token executive? How do women managers acquire tacit knowledge about norms and shared meanings about expectations for behaviors?

Influence and Power: How do women managers adapt their influence strategies to fit demands of the situation? Which influence strategies are more successful than others? How do female executives acquire political power in organizations? What strategies do they use to develop power alliances? To take risks and initiate changes? To circumvent unnecessary red-tape and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures? To develop mentor relationships?

From this review and critique of the women in management literature, the theoretical perspective which seems most promising for communication researchers is the contingency model. This approach, unlike the trait and style perspectives, treats leadership as a compilation of structural and dispositional variables which affect work-member relationships and job performance. The communicative behaviors which contribute to these relationships, while subtle and complex, seem central to the integration, acceptance, and the overall effectiveness of a female manager.

Moreover, the uniqueness of women in this perspective concentrates more on changing the environment rather than on changing individuals.

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